

Ocean Children's Centre

Commodore Street, London, E1 4PF

Inspection date 1–2 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Most young children and their families in the local area are registered at the centre. Key groups are identified for support. However, systems are not in fully in place for accurate analysis of take up of services and the number of those families most in need of support accessing services is not yet reaching a large majority of those in the area.
- Data and targets are not always specific enough for the centre to assess whether it is fully on track. Data gathered by the local authority are not always specific to the reach area or to the centre's key groups. Targets for increasing the take up of services of identified groups and improving outcomes for them, set into the centre's team plans, lack specific measures of success and timescales, so that progress is not measurable for all groups.
- There are no specific targets set for improvement in children's achievements and the centre cannot fully demonstrate the progress that children are making as a result of the centre's involvement.
- Performance monitoring systems are in place throughout the centre, but the quality and depth are inconsistent across services so that the outcomes for families, although not inadequate, are variable.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Families' well-being and personal development improve strongly through taking part regularly in the centre's activities. Everyone is made to feel very welcome and parents' views are valued and influential in shaping services.
- Families thoroughly appreciate being able to play and learn freely in spacious indoor and outdoor play spaces located in the heart of their communities. Although there are not enough courses of the right level for all parents who are looking to progress their own English and numeracy skills, most get involved in helping their children to learn and develop. The centre ensures that children are well prepared with the experiences that will help them settle in well to nursery or school.
- Intensive one-to-one support is highly effective in securing positive outcomes for families with complex or multiple needs. Families that know about the centre say it is a reassuring presence; they put trust in the centre to help them with the day-to-day challenges of young family life moving on and finding employment or when in a crisis.
- The centre's work reduces the risk of harm to children and vulnerable adults through informing and building resilience in families. Well-established multi-agency working ensures that families needing additional support to stay healthy or safe get appropriate help promptly.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. It was carried out at the same time as another children's centre, Wapping Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the community lead and other staff, officers from the local authority, representatives from the health services and several other partners working with the centre. Inspectors met parents and representatives of the Locality Group and parent forum.

The inspectors visited several activities, including two jointly with the community lead who also attended all inspection team meetings.

Inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation, team plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding policies and procedures and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Christine Davies	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Susan Crawford	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The centre serves families across the Stepney and Shadwell areas of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The centre delivers from the main site located with Harry Roberts Nursery School on the Ocean Estate, from Whitehorse Play Centre, Shadwell Play Centre and at other venues in the community. The centre works closely in partnership with Wapping and John Smith Children's Centres, which are managed together for the local authority through the South West Locality Lead. The centre is supported by the South West Locality Stakeholder Group advisory board for the area and the parent forum; parents attend both.

The Ocean Community Lead manages on a day-to-day basis, with the assistance of a family support lead and play and learning lead officer and a team of full- and part-time family support, community development, play and administrative staff. Currently, some team members are seconded or acting-up in their posts. In partnership with other centres and organisations, the centre offers family play and learning, parenting support, information and advice on childcare, education, housing, training and employment, and access to maternity and family health services.

The area is densely populated, with a rapidly growing population of children under five. The current estimate of 1,849 is set to grow by 10% in the next two years because of the rate of housing development in the area. It is among the 30% most deprived in the country, with Shadwell being among the 10% most deprived. There is wide variation in incomes and needs across the area, although most families have low levels of qualification, are on low incomes and up to 20% of families are supported by workless benefits. About half of the population is of Bangladeshi origin, speaking Sylheti, Bangla and English, although many of the families have been established in the area for two or three generations. Some 9% are White British families, with families from a diverse range of Black African, East and South Asian, European, Caribbean and South American backgrounds making up the remainder. The large majority of families speak English as an additional language. Children enter early years provision at levels below those expected for their age.

Wapping Children's Centre was inspected at the same time as this inspection. John Smith Children's Centre was inspected previously. Harry Roberts Nursery School is inspected separately. All these reports can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority and other centres in the locality to increase the participation of families most in need of support to a good or better level, particularly by improving data analysis of data to identify which families are missing out and supporting their access to services.
- Work with the local authority to improve the accuracy and availability of data and to specify measurable targets, particularly relating to groups of families most in need of support and specific to the reach area.
- Improve the consistency and rigour with which centre leaders monitor and evaluate the impact of the centre's work.
- Work with the local authority and schools to track the outcomes for children by the end of Early Years Foundation Stage and improve the monitoring and tracking of the progress that children are making as a result of the centre's input.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Currently 87 % the eligible local families are registered at the centre. The centre shows that 76% of families taking up services are those who most need help. However, this figure counts some individuals more than once depending on the services they are accessing. In reality, a minority, but significant numbers, of families are not receiving enough targeted support to take up services.
- The local authority's data systems provide some of the information about key target groups, but there are some gaps in the data for some groups such as fathers, children receiving nursery education funding and vulnerable children. Some data gathered by the local authority are not specific to the reach area, such as for children with disabilities, parents with disabilities and teenage parents. The information gathered does not always fully reflect the number of vulnerable families the centre has contact with, although it is generally effective for the centre to set broad priorities that match the needs of the area.
- Strong partnerships with health services ensure that families who need additional support are referred to the centre and that the centre has good information to tailor services to families' needs. Community development and family support outreach workers appropriately identify families' needs. Outcomes data show the effectiveness of the match of their services for some of the most vulnerable families.
- A small minority of families refer themselves to the centre. Although only basic information is gathered from the family when they register, good relationship building, observation and information from universal two-year-old checks mean that the centre builds up a more comprehensive picture of needs over time. The centre effectively signposts families to a wide range of advice and guidance services.
- Regular perinatal and child health check sessions at the centre introduce the centre's wider early childhood services to some expectant mothers and families. Midwives register vulnerable mothers to the centre, although not all teenage parents continue in contact. Health visitors encourage fathers to get involved and this is having a positive impact on fathers playing a stronger part in stay-and-play services.
- The centre's partnerships with local schools services support children and parents well when children, including those with disabilities, are starting school. In partnerships with the Family Information Service local providers, the centre gives effective guidance and support to enable families in most need to take up their free entitlement to early education.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Services have a positive impact across many aspects of families' lives and children's learning and development, although the centre does not do enough to make sure that exactly the right groups and individuals who need help are getting the support they need. Although children are happy and engage well in activities, and the feedback that parents give to the centre shows they are very satisfied with play and learning services, the centre does not routinely track or collate information about the progress that different groups of children make. The centre does not demonstrate how stay-and-play sessions improve outcomes for children, or how they adapt to meet needs.
- Families gain a sense of well-being through accessing readily available health, nutrition and parenting advice. Some link the improvement in their emotional health to gaining confidence from parenting courses. The vast majority say their lives have improved through having regular company and positive activities like gardening and singing with their children at stay-and-play sessions. Local information from breastfeeding and baby massage services, speech and language services and psychologists confirms good health outcomes.
- The positive relationships built with families and strong encouragement for parents to speak out on all matters affecting their lives have resulted in a powerful parents' forum and improvements

such as the vegetable garden at Whitehorse Play Centre. In some cases, parents have developed skills through working on projects and carrying out administrative tasks that have successfully led them to train for qualifications and go on into employment.

- One-to-one support for families, who most need help, and work where other agencies are involved, such as through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process, is highly effective. Outcomes are recorded well on files and tracked very closely to show positive improvements in mental health, economic stability and safety of families. There is positive impact in the long run for families receiving support to find training and employment, although there are no targets set to ensure that the scarce opportunities locally make a difference for families most in need.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The centre, together with the local authority and partners, sets priorities for groups most in need of services in the local area. The current targets, set out in the team plan, do not have specific measures of success and timeframes in relation to the centre's identified priority groups. The data provided to the centre are not specific to the reach area and information, such as that for take up of two-year-old funding for early education, is missing. The centre cannot fully measure its progress against targets and its success.
- Parents are frequently asked to evaluate services and returns show that parents have high regard for the activities and the centre's positive impact on their lives. Parents have a strong influence on governance through the parents' forum and the locality group. This advisory board includes a good range of partners providing expertise in health, social care, training and employment.
- This group is strongly supportive of improvements that the centre proposes, for example to strengthen family learning provision in the most deprived area of Shadwell. However, the board presents limited challenge to drive improvement through lack of rigorous analysis and limited questioning of the effectiveness of support to groups of children and the families who need help.
- Day-to-day leadership and management by the community lead are good and staff across the locality have worked well as a team to cover absences. The level of experience among staff is good and most staff are well qualified for their roles.
- Safeguarding policies, procedures and practices are in place and implemented. Case studies demonstrate that the centre's involvement has helped to reduce the level of support needed for some highly vulnerable families. Levels of knowledge in aspects of keeping families safe and meeting the needs of families when they are facing domestic violence or mental ill health are good and enhanced by systematic supervision, review of skills and update of training.
- Care is taken to maintain an attractive and stimulating learning environment in the main site and in venues in the community. Resources are of good quality, expertise is drawn from a wide variety of partner agencies and staff are used well, in line with their skills and experience.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Inspection details

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Inspection number	427582
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1849
Centre leader	Nazma Jalil
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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